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Loving Away White Supremacy?

A critique of narratives of love in white racial justice organizing

by nell, *october 2016*

This is an attempt to describe why I, as a white person invested in racial justice work (and in this particular moment of burgeoning movement in the US), find the use of narratives of "love" employed by white anti-racist efforts and organizations problematic. I refer here to recent use of this rhetoric by Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ),[1] the Unitarian Universalist church[2] and white-led anti-Trump efforts,[3] though these narratives are more widespread[4] and have been employed for some time by white anti-racist groups.

I want to start by saying that I believe the work of these groups is important. I have learned a lot, and reference here, concepts and descriptions of white privilege, racism and white supremacy widely used and disseminated by these and other white anti-racist groups.[5] It is because I share the belief that the systems of white supremacy that structure our world (animating and animated by colonization, hetero-patriarchy, capitalism, and the state) are deeply violent and unjust, have created and continue to reproduce intergenerational trauma, and must change, that I write this.

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[1] Dara Silverman, "Love is Unstoppable" http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/love_is_unstoppable_faith_action_kit;"SURJ Shows Up for Love, Justice and Dignity" 7/8/16; SURJ national statement "Love is Unstoppable: Faith Action Kit"; *SURJ: Showing Up for Racial Justice*, last modified May 4, 2016, http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/surj_statement716

[2] "Showing Your Love," *Standing on the Side of Love*, http://www.standingonthesideoflove.org/showing-your-love/

[3] MoveOn.org printed "Love Trumps Hate" signs for Trump protests outside some of his rallies and appearances:. http://www.jta.org/2016/03/17/news-opinion/united-states/jewish-leaders-plan-to-protest-donald-trump-at-aipac-confab.

[4] I think it's important to note that, in this election year, this rhetoric is ripe for regurgitation by imperialist figures such as Hillary Clinton. They are able to form their lips around its soft, easy contours and have an incentive to do so. http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/07/hillary-clinton-makes-pitch-white-house-will-work/

[5] To be clear, people of color first laid the groundwork for identifying and articulating these concepts: WEB DuBois, James Baldwin, Betita Martinez are just a few among many.

[6] props here to dawn matlak who has articulated this—and many other concepts—so concisely and clearly in our conversations

Smile! by Sara Ahmed
https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/02/02/smile/

"We need to challenge this tendency to think that being positive is being active. It is a tendency that is evident in the affirmative turn within feminism and beyond. The equation is made more or less explicitly: not only that being positive is being active, but that being negative is being passive or reactive.

It might be implied we have a duty to be positive if we are to oppose something because what we oppose is based on negativity. For example some have suggested that fascism is about negative feeling (hatred, resentment). Fascism can just as easily be articulated as a politics of love: a love for a "we" that is fragile and in need of protection, a love that declares we first as an emergency. I have read suggestions that we should challenge fascism by being more loving towards other. The idea that we can love our way out of fascism is deeply problematic. No feeling is going to get out of this, and the idea that we can feel our way out might be how we stay in."

Roxanne Gay, keynote address at Race Forward's Facing Race Conference, Atlanta, 11/11/16
http://fusion.net/story/369626/roxane-gay-donald-trump-president-race-forward-conference/
"Love trumps hate. When you say it over and over, you are literally centering Trump. The election proves love doesn't Trump hate."

Michelle Johnson, trainer at Dismantling Racism Works:
"I am not surprised. I am heart broken but not surprised. This election result will have grave consequences for many. I am not surprised. Donald Trump was strategic in speaking to people's fear and resentment. He inflamed white rage and fear and this is the result. I am not surprised. If you are in shock, I understand. If you are surprised, please remember that white rage and patriarchy have been alive and well since the inception of this country and our disbelief in this new reality is an indication of our privilege and ability not to see the oppression that is in the fabric of our country, that is pulsing through our bodies and cells. I am heart broken. Racism and patriarchy make us disconnect from our own humanity. Racism and patriarchy make us disconnect from each other. Racism and patriarchy make us disconnect from reality and the collective good.

Fear trumps love. That's what he spoke to."

manipulated based on their subtext. There is a tension to navigate here, between taking concrete action to support liberation work on the part of people of color (while consistently critiquing and reflecting on our actions to develop better praxis) and acknowledging at the same time that there is no clear strategy for abolishing whiteness.

And if love is the *goal* that these white racial justice groups are articulating, I would elaborate: there is a long, arduous and unknown process ahead to get to a place where the categories on whose existence white supremacy is premised no longer exist and where we can love and have relationships built on love that don't perpetuate dynamics of oppression and domination. As involvement in white racial justice movements grows, we have a chance to push past reform and work towards radically transformative goals. But this requires being honest about the scope of the project ahead, careful with rhetoric and clear about strategies.

Further reading:
Since Trump's election, which was shortly after I initially published this piece, there's been a lot of great discussion breaking down the false "love trumps hate" mantra. Here are some articles and excerpts by folks of color.

Love Doesn't Trump Hate. Accountability Does. by Aleo Pugh
http://www.bgdblog.org/2016/11/love-doesnt-trump-hate/

"The solution to our president-elect is not love, it is accountability. Love is a Band-Aid solution that allows white folks to continue to evade accountability. To continue to avoid the reality that the overwhelming majority of white folks elected Trump and those who didn't were at the very least complacent. Accountability is essential to creating these loving and supportive communities that are wrongfully imagined as solutions. Love is only effective alongside working to dismantle white supremacy, it is not a solution in itself. Hushing white supremacy into corners with idealist solutions of love are ineffective, because white supremacy, as evident in the 2016 presidential election, will inevitably re-emerge."

Yet I diverge from the ideology, and thus goals and approach, that many white racial justice groups operate from. Much white anti-racism, holding the central tenet that white people can develop a positive white anti-racist identity, is essentially a reform project.[6] I instead subscribe to the ideology that whiteness needs to be abolished. As articulated recently by Kevin Rigby Jr and Hari Ziyad in "White People Have No Place in Black Liberation": "there is no positive space of whiteness."[7] What lies before us requires a complete transformation, a complete overthrow, an upending and unsettling of white supremacy's interlocking systems of domination and the categories they have created. We cannot continue to be "white"— when we understand whiteness to be a social, political and economic construction that serves to uphold a system of racial privilege in which the oppression of people of color is essential.

I write also with the belief that we must continually push the ideologies we operate from, that we must reflect on our actions, and that, especially now in the time of a powerful Movement for Black Lives, folks with white privilege must act as effectively as possible to support the work of Black liberation, to take risks[8] to disrupt the mechanisms of racism and state violence, and to struggle through the infinitely messy work of deconstructing white supremacy. Unfortunately, myself and others working with or within white anti-racist organizations and contexts have experienced a troubling lack of space for critique[9] which stunts our movements by pushing out those who bring criticism and perpetuates white supremacy culture.[10]

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[7] Kevin Rigby Jr. and Hari Ziyad, "White People Have No Place in Black Liberation," *RaceBaitr,* last modified on March 31, 2016, http://racebaitr.com/2016/03/31/white-people-no-place-black-liberation/.

[8] Thanks to harry hvdson's thoughts and analysis on this, that I don't go into here: There is a lot to unpack about what "risk" means for white people: does it necessarily exist at all? Does it reinscribe the figure of the "race traitor," the utmost "good white person"? How is risk calculated and what does it mean for white people to calculate risks themselves? What risks are worth taking or not, and by what standards do white people make those decisions?

[9] In my understanding, there has been an intentional shift towards affirmation, not critique, within the national SURJ organization.

[10] See specifically, "fear of open conflict," "sense of urgency," "defensiveness" and "right to comfort" in Tema Okun's "White Supremacy Culture," https://www.wilder.org/Community-Leadership/Community-Initiatives/REASN/Documents/White-Supremacy-Culture-Workplace.pdf

I am situated in a specific perspective as an assigned-female queer person who benefits from white privilege, class privilege, and cis privilege. Writing for me is a way to struggle with ideas and to express thoughts[11] — I consistently have questions about the ideas I present here and hope to spur debate and dialogue. I think being committed to a process that resists absolutes and holds complexity, allowing for continual change and shifting in our thinking, is part of the process of resisting whiteness. I welcome feedback, critique, questions, thoughts and ideas. Please get in touch at frenzy@riseup.net. Thank you to dawn, harry and vanessa, who helped me develop and edit this piece and to so many people who have helped push my thinking and organizing work throughout the years through conversation, study and action.

Narratives of love employed in a white anti-racist context rely on a subtext rooted in the ideology of liberalism. Some of the concepts these narratives implicitly draw from are individualism, diversity, colorblindness, a centering of intentions and non-violence. These narratives are problematic because they ignore how power operates in systems of oppression, they can silence and put demands on people of color and they further a colonial framework. They also mislead action on the part of white people by simplifying and obscuring a transformative strategy to destroy white supremacy, instead emphasizing a closer reform goal of being able to "love" within intact structures of hierarchy and domination.

diversity, colorblindness and good intentions:

The exhortation to "love" in the context of white racial justice work implies a call for individual white people to put forth benevolent feelings towards people of color; a call to encourage white folks to "love everyone," regardless of skin color. Diversity narratives, well critiqued by now, yet still employed widely in the discussion of race and racism in the US, do not provide an analysis of systems of power.[12] These exhortations imply that love

[11] Here, I want to pay respect to Grace Lee Boggs and her dedication to the dialectic process that I have learned from and to her old comrade and my friend Dr James Jackson, who encouraged me to always struggle with ideas.

[12] Kyra, "How to Uphold White Supremacy by Focusing on Diversity and Inclusion," *Model View Culture*, last modified on December 10, 2014, https://modelviewculture.com/pieces/how-to-uphold-white-supremacy-by-focusing-on-diversity-and-inclusion; Anna Kegler, "The Sugar Coated Language of White Fragility," *Huffington Post*, last modified July 25, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anna-kegler/the-sugarcoated-language-of-white-

guiding force, it can inspire and challenge, but love is not a *strategy*. A strategy is a systematic plan employing actions and tactics to reach a certain goal. Just loving each other or "love" in general is not an effective way to end white supremacy or to cease the state violence enacted against people of color everyday that is required for whiteness to exist.

Strategies attacking white supremacy may look like: projects encouraging white folks to stop calling the cops, to stop relying on systems of state violence to deal with conflict and to instead create alternative systems for creating safety, while at the same time deconstructing what "safety" means to us as white people, and how our sense of safety is reliant on and shaped by systems of oppression.[36] Providing concrete and material support in the form of labor, money and resources to the Movement for Black Lives, movements of undocumented people, movements for indigenous sovereignty and other people of color-led movements, to support those most impacted by white supremacy in creating transformative alternatives. Working to establish Black community control of the police in our localities.[37] Working towards prison abolition, which continues the abolition work started to end slavery. Using the Vision for Black Lives Policy Platform[38] to inform our organizing and concretely work towards some of the goals outlined there. Putting our bodies on the line in solidarity with Black liberation and people of color-led movements to put pressure on the systems and actors of state violence so they cannot continue to operate.

White people can incorporate the *value* of love while employing these and other strategies focused in white communities, to continually struggle to break down and root out the ways white supremacy operates to structure our lives and identities—while being consistently aware of the possible silencing effects love narratives have and how they can be easily

[36] the most in-depth study and discussion I've heard of this concept and the ways that white supremacy has infiltrated us at a cellular level—controlling our fight or flight reactions, defining what feels "safe" to us and more—comes from Heather Hackman and Susan Raffo's training "More than Skin Deep: Uprooting White Privilege and White Supremacy One Cell at a Time," http://www.hackmanconsultinggroup.org/skindeep/

[37] M Adams & Max Rameau, "Black Community Control Over Police," *Wisconsin Law Review* (2016:515), http://wisconsinlawreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/4-Adams-Rameau-Final.pdf

[38] https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/

don't get across to a wider group and, two, love is not a strategy.

I have not seen well-articulated, easy-to-find (as easily as this language is dropped) explanations of these feel-good narratives and this is dangerous—especially at a moment when these groups are working hard to involve masses of new white people in racial justice work.[33] It is misleading to invite white people into this work, that is premised on positive affirmations of white identity, using rhetoric that hearkens to dominant narratives of love which are conceptualized as positive, benevolent feelings, feelings of affection and care towards "others."

To really struggle through the project of deep transformation of oppressive systems there is so much work to do; work that's going to be difficult, painful, deeply challenging, extremely uncomfortable, unsettling, unknown and that means risking things we have taken for granted as people with white privilege[34]—capital, accumulation of wealth, jobs, homes, pensions, benefits, access to stolen land, entitlement to space and freedom of movement, the ability to not be targeted, criminalized and murdered by state violence like people of color are. The people who "think that they are white"[35] need to fully turn their backs on white supremacy. It requires consciously sacrificing comfort and refocusing efforts to redirect resources to support liberation work led by people of color.

Taking action along these lines requires a strategy. Working to abolish oppressive power structures can be motivated by love, love can be a *value* we hold, it can be a motivating and

[33] one of SURJ's main focuses right now is "base building": http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/surj_basebuilding_calls

[34] There are many crucial complexities to account for based on the various other positions of class, gender, ability, etc. that white people inhabit. For example, the first part of this list would apply only to white people with class privilege, entitlement to space differs based on gender, freedom of movement varies based on ability and how people are (not) targeted by violence under patriarchy.

[35] James Baldwin, "On Being 'White' and Other Lies," *Black on White* (New York: Schocken Books, 1998), p. 180., and Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the Word and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), p. 146.

is somehow exempt from the power dynamics that structure white supremacy; that love is horizontal, the great equalizer—and all white people have to do is offer "love" to dissolve the power imbalances inherent in this system.

But power is clearly not equal and shared. White people and people of color do not have the same histories or experiences, and are not treated and valued the same under white supremacy. A narrative of colorblindness, pushed by liberal, silencing forces that wish to absorb efforts toward transformation, allows white people to think that mimicking love narratives that are also employed by people of color[13] will erase the benefits white supremacy provides them. To use the "Love Trumps Hate" rhetoric as an example, white supremacy benefits both white people working for racial justice who "love" and white Trump supporters who "hate." This over-simplified rhetoric emphasizes either/or thinking[14] and creates a false dichotomy that can make white anti-racists feel exceptional.

Leaning on ideologies of diversity and colorblindness also embeds in these narratives the false promise that if white folks can just truly love folks of color, or "love everyone" regardless of race, or just "love" as this unexplained rhetoric proclaims, and can get other white folks to do the same, the current system of racism will crumble. But the operations of structural racism will not come crashing down based on individual loving relationships. A system of white supremacy that necessitates state violence against people of color can still exist without the individual white racist,[15] or, in this case, with the loving white anti-racist. As long as whiteness exists, "constructed for no other purpose than to occupy the space of racial superiority,"[16] power will not be shifted sufficiently to destroy white supremacy.

[13] just a few examples of people of color employing love: Alicia Garza, Black Lives Matter, https://www.theodysseyonline.com/lives-matter-others, Debra's Love Thrift Boutique, https://www.facebook.com/debraslovecoop/

[14] see specifically, "either/or thinking" in Tema Okun's "White Supremacy Culture" https://www.wilder.org/Community-Leadership/Community-Initiatives/REASN/Documents/White-Supremacy-Culture-Workplace.pdf

[15] Just two among many resources discussing the mechanics of structural racism: Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: The New Press, 2012), and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists,* (Maryland: Roman & Littlefield, 2009)

[16] Kevin Rigby Jr. and Hari Ziyad, "White People Have No Place in Black Liberation," *RaceBaitr,* last modified on March 31, 2016, http://racebaitr.com/2016/03/31/white-people-no-place-black-liberation/.

White people just "loving," or envisioning a "better world" built on "love," doesn't describe or emphasize the extremely long and difficult work that is necessary to deconstruct the system of white supremacy. Love, within the devastating structures of racism in which we live and which threaten to wholly define our interactions and relationships, will not just feel good or comfortable; it cannot just be associated with benevolent or positive feelings.

Love's association with "benevolence" in the subtext of these narratives is also suspect. As Sara Ahmed describes, "'to love the abject' is close to the liberal politics of charity, one that usually makes the loving subject feel better for having loved and given love to someone presumed to be unloved, but which sustains the relations of power that compel the charitable love to be shown in this way."[17] In white spaces focused on racial justice, love can function to make people feel good about themselves, as they imagine resisting racism means acting colorblind by extending love to people that white supremacy has deemed "unloved." Yet this only serves to reinforce paternalism, which is a function of white supremacy and colonialism.

There is also a connection here to a widely used concept within white anti-racist education: intent versus impact. This concept describes that within a structure of institutional racism, white people might have good intentions, but because of the larger violent mechanisms of white supremacy, the impacts of those actions can still be harmful to people of color.

But these love narratives flip the script and imply that white people's intentions matter: if white folks intend to find within themselves the capacity to love, have loving intentions, or believe they come from a place of love, this is a satisfactory contribution to the movement to "end racism." This narrow focus on feelings and intentions of love threatens to obscure the reckoning we must do with the larger mechanisms of structural racism. In considering the impact of this focus, there are many outcomes that allow white people to smile, give a hug, feel good and at the same time, as just two examples, contribute to a racist workplace culture or erase the stories and experiences of people of color by furthering gentrification.

[17] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 140.

The recent police murder of Korryn Gaines is particularly relevant here. As Charlene Carruthers[29] and Mariame Kaba have presented, white supremacy does not allow Black women to defend themselves or their children. And, further, that Black women are denied legal standing, denied personhood before the law; deemed to have "no selves to defend."[30] Korryn Gaines was protecting herself and her son from the primary actors of state violence, the police, after they kicked down her door to serve a bench warrant connected to a traffic stop. As Carruthers explains, "America's investment in policing and prisons prevents our ability to create systems of safety and protection for Black families. Given this, we must question the means Black parents have to protect their children." Without experiencing or considering these mechanisms of structural racism and anti-Blackness, white people can consider people of color "violent" when they resist state and vigilante violence. And not consider that within oppressed communities, this resistance can be an act of love.

strategizing as the white racial justice movement grows

I don't think everyone employing love narratives necessarily agree with the concepts of diversity, colorblindness, centering intentions and nonviolence. Some white folks committed to racial justice do have an understanding of the insidious nature of these violent and oppressive systems and do realize the difficulty of love, of loving, while these systems exist. Yet relying on and promoting this rhetoric misleadingly offers a simplistic vision: all we have to do is "love." It implies a clear path: it's simple, it's love.

When to abolish whiteness and to really transform these systems of oppression, there is no clear path, and traversing an unknown process is actually essential to the outcome.[31] This leads to other problems as the white racial justice movement continues to grow exponentially:[32] one, these nuances and deeper analyses

[29] Charlene Carruthers, "In Defense of Korryn Gaines, Black Women and Children," *Colorlines*, August 5, 2016, http://www.colorlines.com/articles/defense-korryn-gaines-black-women-and-children-opinion

[30] Rachel Caidor and Mariame Kaba, "No Selves to Defend" exhibition July 18 to September 30, 2014 at Art In These Times. http://noselves2defend.tumblr.com

[31] "Only in this frenzy, when the sense of order that is critical to whiteness turns to chaos in every place, can the motivation to destroy it overcome the compulsion to reform it." Rigby Jr. & Zayid, "White People Have No Place in Black Liberation," http://racebaitr.com/2016/03/31/white-people-no-place-black-liberation/

[32] In 2015, SURJ grew "from 12 chapters to over 140," December 29, 2015, national email.

transformative revolutionary action."[25]

In "Love as the Practice of Freedom," she also writes, "A culture of domination is anti-love. It requires violence to sustain itself."[26] This can all too easily be used by people within white racial justice efforts more comfortable with reform to support a conclusion that "love" thus necessitates ideologic nonviolence. In the way King's legacy is sanitized and simplified[27] to reproduce white supremacy, white racial justice efforts can selectively draw from bell hooks to do the same. Using love narratives rooted in these false equivalencies of love and nonviolence and anti-love and violence and domination legitimizes the operations of the current racial hierarchy by delegitimizing resistance on the part of people of color.

There are other things necessary for freedom, that bell hooks allows for, including militant resistance and self defense. However, many white people on the Left, and some within racial justice movements, do not allow for self-defense: self-defense on the part of oppressed peoples, self-defense as a legitimate means for survival within a system of racialized state and vigilante violence. Because they do not have to defend themselves from this same onslaught of violence that subjugates people of color, they deem violence, even within the context of self-defense, unacceptable.

Colonialism and white supremacy are predicated upon double standards like this. As Robert F. Williams asserted, "the Afro-American militant...does not introduce violence into a racist social system—the violence is already there, and has always been there. It is precisely this unchallenged violence that allows a racist social system to perpetuate itself. When people say that they are opposed to Negroes 'resorting to violence' what they really mean is that they are opposed to Negroes defending themselves and challenging the exclusive monopoly of violence practiced by white racists."[28]

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[25] bell hooks, *Killing Rage* (New York: Henry and Holt, 1995), p.19.

[26] bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 246.

[27] Page May, "Reclaim MLK: Beyond Sanitized Narratives," *Truthout*, January 18, 2016, http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/34444-reclaim-mlk-beyond-sanitized-narratives

[28] Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (New York: Marzani & Munsell, 1962), And include here, racist institutions, such as the police, or "the exclusive monopoly of [state] violence."

love as silencer & love as demand

In a similar way that white people putting forth benevolent feelings towards people of all races and ethnic backgrounds maintains the current structure of power, expecting or demanding love back from people of color while white supremacy is still intact is also a function of colonialism.

If white folks feel they are addressing racism through "love," the dominant narrative of love being associated with positive feelings and white supremacy culture already curating a conflict-adverse environment, this can close them off to listening to and understanding the rage of people of color. It can also lead them to discount legitimate tactics which some communities of color engage in—such as disruption, urban rebellions, separatism and militant resistance. This sets up an environment in which white people are only open to things they deem "loving" dialogue or forms of protest; the rhetoric of love is often twisted and used to reinforce white fragility[18] and ideologies of nonviolence.

This can be seen in the question I've heard many times in the past couple years in reference to Black Lives Matter protests that goes something like this: "Why do they have to block the roads? I mean, I understand their concerns, but can't we just sit down and have a loving dialogue about this?"[19] It can also be seen in white people's reactions to people of color expressing anger in discussions of racism and microaggressions: "I just don't understand why you have to raise your voice. We're all coming from a place of love here." It is dangerous to frame love as an expectation or demand[20] in the context of racialized systems of power. It silences the rage and anger people of color can express in response to racial oppression.

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[18] Robin DiAngelo describes white fragility as an "insulated environment of racial protection [that] builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress."
"White Fragility,." *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3, no. 3 (2011), accessed October 9, 2016, http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ijcp/article/viewFile/249/116

[19] In addition to reinforcing the existing power structure by undermining tactics that seek to disrupt the day-to-day operations of white supremacy, there is much to be said about the historical significance of blocking roads in protests addressing police murders of Black people: Emily Badger, "Why highways have become the center of civil rights protest," *The Washington Post*, July 13, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/07/13/why-highways-have-become-the-center-of-civil-rights-protest/

[20] I draw here from ideas articulated in Claire Urbanski's *Stuck in Place*, https://www.etsy.com/listing/159588189/stuck-in-place-thoughts-on-belonging?ref=listing-shop-header-1

Applied in interpersonal relationships, invoking "love" deflects the burden from white people to do more emotional reaching. When it becomes a demand leveled by white people, "love" is not symmetrical; it requires more work on the part of people of color to overcome the barriers that white supremacy creates to shared and consensual relationships free of hierarchy. These narratives, and other narratives endemic to a hegemonically Christian society, have elevated love to the ultimate goal or ethic, thus well-intentioned white people want there to be love, and, yes, feel entitled to love. The scope of entitlement white people have knows no boundaries. Whether it's entitlement to land, cultural and spiritual practices, intimate spaces that people of color maintain for themselves, or to "love" in interpersonal relationships. Demanding this extra emotional reaching is a function of colonialism.

It maintains dynamics of oppression as white people assume that love is possible within racialized systems of power. First expecting it in return, because *they* are offering it, and then demanding it from people of color, when they identify something missing or a barrier within an interpersonal relationship—instead of turning the focus on white supremacy, which is the real barrier. These narratives of love can be interpreted as an expectation for folks of color to love too, to return that love, before the necessary social and political transformation is completed that will allow the space to have mutual relationships based on shared power.

And although relationships of love can exist within systems of oppression, we can still perpetuate harm on one another because of these hierarchical structures. I do not want to be satisfied with love that is still so painful and difficult because of oppressive systems, and still gives folks with privileged identities more power. My goal is not just to love within intact oppressive power structures—and I think some white folks working for racial justice are fighting for more—it is to destroy these structures. Yet a colonial framework will only be perpetuated when white people demand love and use it to ensure domination.

the congruency of love and nonviolence

From the subtext of these love narratives we can also draw connections to ideologies of nonviolence. Here I want to reference a very widely disseminated and referenced essay in white anti-racist education and organizations, bell hooks' "Love as the Practice of Freedom."[21] While I do not disagree with her assertion that, "Without love, our efforts to liberate ourselves and our world community from oppression and exploitation are doomed,"[22] there are other assertions around love, violence and nonviolence in this essay that are, unsurprisingly but problematically, latched onto by folks working within white anti-racist movements.

In this essay, hooks distinguishes Martin Luther King Jr's nonviolence strategies "fundamentally rooted in a love ethic"[23] from militant Black liberation and Black Power strategies. While maintaining that Black Power struggles shifted the focus from reform to revolution she says that a focus on power "shifted away from a love ethic...the new militancy of masculinist black power equated love with weakness, announcing that the quintessential expression of freedom would be the willingness to coerce, do violence, terrorize, indeed utilize the weapons of domination."[24]

While I do not question that misogyny and patriarchy played out in extremely harmful ways within Black Power movements of the sixties, these dynamics can be found in a myriad of movements, including the civil rights movement and white racial justice movements, and I disagree with the implication that militancy and demands to shift power are inherently patriarchal and misogynist. hooks does not assert this implication throughout her works, so it is troubling that white racial justice circles widely promote and invoke this essay in particular. For example, in "Killing Rage," hooks states: "As long as black rage continues to be represented as always and only evil and destructive, we lack a vision of militancy that is necessary for

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[21] bell hooks, "Love as the Practice of Freedom," *Outlaw Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), http://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/hooks_Love_As_The_Practice_Of_Freedom.pdf

[22] bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 243.

[23] *Outlaw Culture* p. 244

[24] *Outlaw Culture*, p. 245